New Options for Calculating Semester Grades

IN RESPONSE TO SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY INTEREST in reducing testing and increasing instructional time, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is revising its strategy for assessments that includes the elimination of two-hour semester final exams in high school courses. This revised assessment strategy was presented to the Montgomery County Board of Education in July 2015 and was endorsed by the Board on September 8, 2015. The assessment strategy includes a proposal to eliminate all two-hour semester final exams in high school courses beginning in 2016–2017, restoring at least two weeks of instructional time throughout the school year. These exams would be replaced with centrally developed marking period assessments, which can be given during regular class periods.

Assessment serves an essential role in ensuring that rigorous, effective, and equitable teaching and learning occurs consistently across schools at all grade levels. The goal of the MCPS assessment strategy is to—

- Align local assessments to new standards and state/national measures;

- Gather formative assessment data throughout the school year to inform instruction, allowing for students to receive timely supports and interventions;

- Provide students with more frequent and varied measures to demonstrate learning; and

- Use assessment data to facilitate accountability and central office monitoring and support.

It is important to note that new marking period assessments will be centrally developed and consistent throughout the district, but may not be multiple choice tests. For example, as part of an instructional unit, a student might take a unit test in math or complete an inquiry-based project in science. Although many assessments of this nature are already in place, these would become required in certain courses and scored consistently across the district. As a result, there could be changes to the way the final semester grade is calculated in MCPS secondary school courses. Currently, in high school courses in which a two-hour semester final exam is administered, the exam counts for 25 percent of the final semester grade.

To develop options for our assessment strategy, MCPS reached out to more than 20 school districts (13 from the state of Maryland) to gain an understanding of existing trends and practices. We found that final exam and assessment practices vary widely, as does the manner in which districts calculate final course grades. A few neighboring school districts have embarked on similar initiatives to eliminate final exams in favor of marking period assessments.

Based on our research and discussions with educators, Board of Education members, and others, MCPS is considering several options for calculating semester grades. MCPS will gather feedback on the following options and make a decision later this fall about grading calculations. Feedback can be provided online at www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org, search "grading options". The deadline for submitting feedback is October 19, 2015.

OPTION 1: Numeric (Percent) Average

Remove final exam/evaluation category. Each marking period carries equal weight; final grade calculated by averaging marking period percentage grades (MP1 + MP2 / 2).*

EXAMPLES:

MP1*	MP2*		FINAL SEMESTER GRADE
92% A	88% B	=	90% A
90% A	80% B	=	85% B
95% A	75% C	=	85% B
57% E	62% D	=	59.5% D
56% E	61% D	=	58.5% E

CURRENT GRADING SCALE

89.5%-100%	A
79.5%-89.4%	B
69.5%-79.4%	C
59.5%-69.4%	D
Less than 59.5%	E

* Standardized centrally developed assessments will be administered each marking period in courses for which there was previously a centrally developed final exam. These assessments will represent a meaningful portion of the final marking period grade, consistently across schools.

OPTION 2: Quality Point Average

Remove final exam/evaluation category. Each marking period carries equal weight. Quarter and semester grades reported by letter grade; final grade calculated by averaging quality points (MP1 + MP2 / 2).*

EXAMPLES:

MP1*	MP2*		FINAL SEMESTER GRADE
A (4)	B (3)	=	3.5 = A
A (4)	C (2)	=	3.0 = B
D (1)	A (4)	=	2.5 = B
E (0)	D (1)	=	.5 = E

SCALE

A = 4	A = 3.5 – 4.0
B = 3	B = 2.5 – 3.49
C = 2	C = 1.5 – 2.49
D = 1	D = .75 – 1.49
E = 0	E = Below .75

* Standardized centrally developed assessments will be administered each marking period in courses for which there was previously a centrally developed final exam. These assessments will represent a meaningful portion of the final marking period grade, consistently across schools.

OPTION 3: Trend

Remove final exam/evaluation category. Two marking period grades, averaged by trend (MP2 carries elevated weight).* (Currently used in courses in which there is no final exam, per grading chart attached.)

EXAMPLES:

MP1*	MP2*		FINAL SEMESTER GRADE
A	B	=	B
B	A	=	A
D	A	=	B
A	D	=	C
D	E	=	E
E	D	=	D

* Standardized centrally developed assessments will be administered each marking period in courses for which there was previously a centrally developed final exam. These assessments will represent a meaningful portion of the final marking period grade, consistently across schools.

OPTION 4: Additional "Final Evaluation" Assessment Category

Keep current final exam category weighted at 25%**, replace with teacher-developed "final evaluation" administered in class. Keep current grade averaging per grading chart attached. (Currently used for students exempt from MCPS final exams in AP/IB courses.)

EXAMPLES:

MP1*	MP2*	EVALUATION 25%**	FINAL SEMESTER GRADE
A	B	B	B
B	A	B	B
A	B	A	A
E	D	E	E

* Standardized centrally developed assessments will be administered each marking period in courses for which there was previously a centrally developed final exam. These assessments will represent a meaningful portion of the final marking period grade, consistently across schools.

** Additional possibilities under this option:
- The current final exam category could be maintained, but weighted at a lower percentage (10–20%).
- Marking period assessments given in MP1 + MP2 could be added together to generate a grade in the third "evaluation" category.

Grade Configuration for Semester Grades
(Final Exam = 25%)

Teachers have the option to force a grade up or down depending upon the student's performance in the course and mastery of the course objectives.

Explanation on how to interpret the grades:
Example: CBE = C means the Quarter 1 grade is C, Quarter 2 grade is B, Exam grade is E and the semester grade is C. The semester grade is the grade that appears on the student's transcript.

AAA = A	BAA = A	CAA = B	DAA = B	EAA = B
AAB = A	BAB = B	CAB = B	DAB = B	EAB = C
AAC = A	BAC = B	CAC = B	DAC = C	EAC = C
AAD = B	BAD = B	CAD = B	DAD = C	EAD = C
AAE = B	BAE = B	CAE = C	DAE = C	EAE = C
ABA = A	BBA = B	CBA = B	DBA = B	EBA = C
ABB = B	BBB = B	CBB = B	DBB = C	EBB = C
ABC = B	BBC = B	CBC = C	DBC = C	EBC = C
ABD = B	BBD = B	CBD = C	DBD = C	EBD = D
ABE = B	BBE = C	CBE = C	DBE = C	EBE = D
ACA = B	BCA = B	CCA = B	DCA = C	ECA = C
ACB = B	BCB = B	CCB = C	DCB = C	ECB = C
ACC = B	BCC = C	CCC = C	DCC = C	ECC = D
ACD = B	BCD = C	CCD = C	DCD = D	ECD = D
ACE = C	BCE = C	CCE = C	DCE = D	ECE = D
ADA = B	BDA = B	CDA = C	DDA = C	EDA = D
ADB = B	BDB = C	CDB = C	DDB = C	EDB = D
ADC = C	BDC = C	CDC = C	DDC = D	EDC = D
ADD = C	BDD = C	CDD = D	DDD = D	EDD = D
ADE = C	BDE = C	CDE = D	DDE = D	EDE = E
AEA = B	BEA = C	CEA = C	DEA = D	EEA = D
AEB = C	BEB = C	CEB = C	DEB = D	EEB = D
AEC = C	BEC = C	CEC = D	DEC = D	EEC = D
AED = C	BED = D	CED = D	DED = D	EED = E
AEE = C	BEE = D	CEE = D	DEE = E	EEE = E

Grade Configuration for 9-week Marking Periods without Exam
(Also for 2nd semester of senior year)

AA = A	BA = A	CA = B	DA = B	EA = C
AB = B	BB = B	CB = B	DB = C	EB = C
AC = B	BC = C	CC = C	DC = C	EC = D
AD = C	BD = C	CD = D	DD = D	ED = D
AE = C	BE = D	CE = D	DE = E	EE = E